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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3174
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 4542
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 6660
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 1797
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RUEAEPA/HQ EPA WASHDC
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SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV
TREASURY FOR USED IBRD AND IDB AND INTL/MDB
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: MZWEED
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: J WEAVER
JUSTICE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: JWEBB
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: G FLANLEY
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [XR](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 72

1. The following is the seventy-second in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. The e-mail version also contains a calendar of upcoming ESTH events in the region.

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Agriculture

13. Venezuela Produces Ecological Cocoa

MAR. 04, 2006 - Twenty farmers from Ocumare de la Costa, 120 km northwest of Caracas, produced 5,000 kilograms of cocoa without using agro-chemicals in their cultivation, qualifying it as an "organic product" for the certifying entity Biolatina, based in Peru. The project was a joint effort, over nearly three years, of the association of farmers, government agencies and non-governmental Tierra Viva Foundation. The project aims to "reach all farmers near the Henri Pittier National Park," an unusual mountain rainforest along Venezuela's central Caribbean coast, where Chuao cocoa is produced, one of the most aromatic in the world.

Source - Tierramerica

14. Uruguay Subsidizes Sustainable Agriculture Projects

FEB. 28, 2006 - The GOU announced it will provide US\$40 million in financial support for rural producers working to improve the management of natural resources and biodiversity. This subsidy is part of a larger governmental program for "Responsible Production," which will extend until 2011. The program hopes to improve soil,

water, and biodiversity management and contribute to agricultural development in Uruguay. World Bank, UNEP, and FAO are the organizations that provided the money.

Source - SciDev

[15. Argentina: Biotechnology Law Approved by Senate](#)

FEB. 23, 2006 - The Argentine Senate has approved a biotechnology law, which will stimulate the development of both research and production in modern biotechnology. The law will provide discounts and bonuses for biotech research projects over the next fifteen years. Argentina has over 80 biotech companies, most of which work

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with genetically modified seeds for agricultural use.

Source - SciDev

[16. Brazilian Soybean Production to Drop by 1.9 Million Tons in 2006](#)

FEB. 21, 2006 - As a result of drought and a lack of investment in technology, the Brazilian soybean crop this year is expected to drop to 56.26 million tons, which represents about 1.9 million tons less than the 58 million tons originally forecast.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia. Original source: Folha de Sco Paulo

Health

[17. Brazil, USAID Disagree on AIDS Prevention](#)

MAR. 14, 2006 - Weekend Brazilian newspapers picked up on the public exchange between the director of Brazil's National AIDS Program, Pedro Chequer, and the USAID in Brazil. According to the reports, Chequer accused the USAID of planning to implement programs to foster abstinence as a means of preventing AIDS contamination among young Brazilian populations without first getting authorization from Brazilian health officials. The stories note that USAID responded that this issue had been discussed with the Brazilian officials, and that there had been an agreement for addressing abstinence as one of the possible means of prevention.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

[18. GM Mosquitoes Stop Dengue Virus Replicating](#)

MAR. 14, 2006 - Mosquitoes can be genetically modified to resist being infected by the virus that causes dengue fever, say researchers. It is the first time that scientists have bred mosquitoes that not only resist 'type 2' dengue virus - the most prevalent strain - but also pass this resistance on to their offspring. Dengue fever is spread through the bite of the Aedes aegypti mosquito. Each year, the virus kills about 20,000 of the 50 million people it infects across the developing world. The researchers say that releasing the genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes could help prevent people from catching the disease as the mosquitoes would no longer be able to transmit the virus. They add, though, that much more research is needed before this can happen. The team, led by Ken Olson of Colorado State University in the United States, published their findings 13 March in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Source - SciDev

[19. Argentine Researchers Identify Night Blindness as Symptom of Chagas](#)

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MAR. 05, 2006 - Researchers from the Instituto de Investigaciones en

Genetica y Biologia Molecular in Argentina concluded that the antibodies produced during an attack by the parasite *Tripanosoma cruzi* affect the cells of the retina, leading to night blindness. The findings, which were published in the FASEB Journal, may help determine (in the future) which specific antibodies cause heart and retina damage in order to perform better diagnosis.

Source - SciDev

Water Issues

10. Chile: Opposition to Four Mega-Dams

MAR. 04, 2006 - An international offensive led by the U.S.-based International Rivers Network seeks to prevent financial agencies from funding the Spanish transnational Endesa for building four huge hydroelectric dams on the Baker and Pascua rivers, 1,800 km south of the Chilean capital. According to Endesa, the project will be ready in 2008 and activated between 2012 and 2018. It will generate 2,430 megawatts, require the construction of 2,000 km of transmission lines and flood of some 9,000 hectares.

Source - Tierramerica

11. Green Issues Delay Brazilian Dam Projects

FEB. 2006 - Brazil, undeterred by the December sale of just seven of 17 dam concessions slated for auction, plans a new round of bidding in May to meet energy demand expected over the next two to three years. In another move to boost the power supply, the government has announced plans to issue preliminary environmental licenses this year for two large dams on the Amazon region's Madeira River. Concessions for the dams, whose collective generating capacity would total 6,450 megawatts (MW), could be auctioned off as soon as the second half of the year. Critics of the government's hydropower policy dismiss the Amazon dam-licensing news as an election-year gambit by the government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to shift attention from its weak December auction. The government originally had planned to sell concessions for 17 small and medium-sized dams. But state and federal environmental agencies only granted preliminary environmental licenses for 11 of the projects. Of those projects, two were sidelined by court injunctions and two others by an administrative glitch.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Forests

12. Greenpeace Denounces Deforestation in Brazil

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MAR. 08, 2006 - While Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defended, in an article published by the UK newspaper The Guardian, his government's progress in the environmental preservation, NGO Greenpeace published a one-page announcement in the newspaper The Independent, in which it criticizes the destruction of the Amazon Forest. "Since president Lula came to the power, an area of the Amazon Forest larger than the half of the size of England was destroyed illegally by lumbermen, soy production and cattle ranching", Greenpeace says. This occurred while President Lula was on official visit to England.

Source - Planet Save

13. Brazil Clears Law on Amazon Wood Logging

MAR. 06, 2006 - Brazil has approved a law granting licenses for logging in publicly owned sections of the Amazon rainforest, a move aimed at halting its destruction. Under the new law - signed by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva - timber companies will be given

up to 40-year licenses under the condition that all logging be sustainable. Independent inspections of licensed sites are to be carried out every five years. Critics of the law have argued this is not enough. But environmental groups and experts have hailed the new law as a milestone in the fight to preserve the Amazon, about 17 percent of which has been destroyed to date, studies say. About 75 percent of the rain forest is publicly owned, and the government plans to offer commercial access to three percent of this rainforest over the next 10 years.

Source - MercoPress

14. Preserving Chile's Southern Forests

MAR 9, 2006 - The recently created Karukinka nature reserve in the Chilean part of the Tierra del Fuego reserve traces its history back to the 1990s, when Trillium, an American firm, attempted to log the island's forests of lenga, a type of beech found only in southern Chile and Argentina. The project, however, ran into opposition from local environmental groups and failed. In 2002 Goldman Sachs acquired the loans that had backed the project--and with them the 2,750 square kilometer property--as part of a package of distressed debt. Two years later the firm donated the land to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) of New York and the reserve was born. Initially, the project will focus on restoring the ecosystem to its original condition--in particular by "containing" beavers introduced from Canada in the 1950s for fur farming. In the absence of predators, these rodents have run amok, damming every river in sight and causing extensive damage to the trees. Moreover, the reserve aims to serve as a model for the conservation of southern Patagonia, in which Tierra del Fuego is located. But, although the area is the largest in Chile under the management of an overseas conservation organization and, possibly, the best funded, it is not Chile's first private reserve.

Source - The Economist (no link), article kindly shared by US Embassy Santiago.

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15. Chile: Forest Fire Prevention Effort Pays Off

MAR. 06, 2006 - Fewer forest fires occurred in 2005/2006 than in any of the previous five years, reported CONAF, the state forestry agency. CONAF reported that only 3,530 fires occurred this year, a 32% drop compared to the 5,205 fires that have occurred on average in the past five years. Forest losses fell 70 percent this year compared to last season. Fire prevention has been emphasized by CONAF in communities where fires are most apt to occur, especially Regions V and VIII. Getting special attention, too, was the Torres del Paine National Park, which lost more than 15,000 hectares of forest due to a negligent camper using a cook stove in an area where it was not allowed.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

Wildlife

16. New Private Bird Watching Park Launched In Chile

MAR. 17, 2006 - Sixty two hectares of property owned by the Modinger Brothers Meat Packing Company near the town of Llanquihue have been converted into one of the few thematic parks to exist in southern Chile. The newly created Maullin River Ornithological Park provides a home to over 100 different species of birds native to the local forests including the Chucao, the Hued Hued, the Black Woodpecker, the Choroy Parrot, and the Black-Necked Swan. The endangered river nutria will also be featured in this park. The park opens officially on April 1 and is located six kilometers from Llanquihue in Region X, about 30 minutes north of Puerto Montt.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

17. Invasion of Scorpions in Argentina

FEB. 28, 2006 - The recent invasion of scorpions has resulted in three deaths with a rise in the number of attacks within the last year. In La Rioja, a socio-economically deprived area, a six-year old girl was the third death in the last month. A seven year old boy was also attacked in La Rioja in December 2005. The other death of a four year old boy occurred in Poma, northeast of Aimogasta, a few days earlier. The three deaths and increasing number of cases support the theory that there is an invasion of scorpions in La Rioja and Catamarca. Nito Brizuela, an environmentalist, reported scorpions in fifty-four neighborhoods of San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca, the provincial capital. The most poisonous specie, *Titius trivitatus*, was found in nine of the neighborhoods. In 2003, this species had only been detected in one neighborhood.

Source - Clarin. Kindly shared by US Embassy Buenos Aires.

Protected Areas

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18. Paraguay is Able to Extend Area of Nature Reserve

FEB. 23, 2006 - With the help of international NGOs WWF, TNC, and World Parks, Guyra Paraguay (a local NGO) was able to add another 2,100 hectares to the San Rafael Reserve, in the Upper Parana region of the country. According to the press report, fifty percent of the land was obtained through a Debt for Nature swap agreement between the United States and Paraguay through WWF. More financing is needed to maintain the area, which now encompasses 5,800 hectares (note: the area of the San Rafael region extends 78,000 hectares, but only 5,800 are guaranteed as a reserve). On another note, the government of Taiwan has agreed to cooperate with Paraguay in joining two parks, Taro and Avyrareta, within the San Rafael area. An exchange in biodiversity research is also part of the agreement, which was discussed in 2004 and will (tentatively) be signed during the next visit of the Taiwan delegation.

Source - IUCN

Science & Technology

19. Peru: University Invites Presidential Candidates to Discuss S&T

MAR. 14, 2006 - Only three of the twenty-five presidential candidates for the upcoming election in Peru agreed to present their science and technology program to a specialized audience on March 09 at the Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, in Lima; neither of which were ranked amongst the top electoral preferences. One of the main concerns of those present at the event is to guarantee that the country's current S&T plan, valid until 2012, will be carried out regardless of the political party governing the country.

Source - SciDev

20. A Perspective on S&T in Colombia

MAR. 14, 2006 - According to the new director of Colciencias (Colombia Institute for Scientific Development), Felipe Garcia, Colombia needs an advanced level in science and technology in order to advance as a country. Garcia hopes to create a strong link between researchers and the productive sector. Juan Alfredo Pinto, president of the Colombian Association of Small and Medium Industries pointed the need for a Ministry of S&T to stimulate competitiveness. Eduardo Posada, president of the Colombian Association for the Advance of Science believes an entity similar to the U.S. National Science Foundation would be appropriate.

Source - SciDev

21. Argentina to Subsidize Twenty-eight S&T Institutions

MAR. 10, 2006 - The minister of Education, Science, and Technology,

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Daniel Filmus, announced recently that the GOA will provide subsidies totalling US\$1.5 million up to 2008 to twenty-eight scientific institutions in the country. Filmus highlighted the importance of sponsoring scientific projects and announced that the National Agency for Science Promotion will be launching a graduate course for capacity-building of human resources - investing a total of US\$40 million.

Source - SciDev

Industrialization

¶22. Brazil Calls for Uruguayan-Argentine Dialogue over Pulp Plants Dispute

MAR. 16, 2006 - Brazil called for frank dialogue between Uruguay and Argentina in an attempt to bring about a settlement in their dispute over the installation of two pulp plants on Uruguayan territory. "Differences between countries in our region can be resolved by a frank dialogue and by understanding between leaders," Lula told the press, after meeting with Uruguay's president Tabare Vazquez at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia. The Uruguayan president started his five-nation tour discussing the conflict between Uruguay and Argentina over the construction of two pulp factories. Argentina is opposed to the project, saying the paper factories will contaminate the waters of River Uruguay, a river shared by the two countries.

Source - Xinhuanet.com

Pollution

¶23. Cutting Methane Emissions 'Will Save 370,000 Lives'

MAR. 07, 2006 - Reducing methane emissions by 20 per cent could prevent 370,000 deaths worldwide between 2010 and 2030, say researchers in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The researchers add that the money saved by preventing these deaths would exceed the cost of cutting emissions. Jason West, of Princeton University, and colleagues note that a lack of data from developing countries makes it difficult to predict just how health benefits would manifest there. The main human activities that contribute to methane emissions are cattle and rice farming. Other sources include coal mining, landfill sites, and the burning of biomass.

Source - SciDev

Energy

¶24. Brazil Proposes Regional Energy Market

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MAR. 04, 2006 - Latin America should form a regional market for cheap energy that will boost development across the continent, a top energy official said March 3rd. The Latin American market would include oil, gas and electricity and could be modeled after the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the European Union, said Norberto de Franco Medeiros, head of the Brazilian Committee of the World Energy Council. Medeiros said the Council had proposed a two-year study of possible energy links in Latin America. The centerpieces of the continental link would be a 5,000-mile (8,000 km) pipeline from Venezuela to Argentina, cutting through Brazil's Amazon rain forest and branching off to Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. Medeiros also cited the proposed construction

of two hydroelectric dams on the Amazon and the Madeira River that could provide "cheap and competitive energy" for Brazil and neighboring Bolivia. The projects are pending approval by Brazil's Environment Ministry.

Source - MercoPress

125. Peru: Camisea Chaos

MAR. 04, 2006 - The March 4 rupture of the Camisea pipeline, which affected nearly 150,000 square meters of farmland and destroyed several homes, has the Gas Transport Consortium (TGP) and the Peruvian Government scrambling for answers. Energy and Mines Minister Glodomiro Sanchez, back from the Prospectors and Developers Conference in Toronto, visited the impacted zone, in Cusco's jungle region, as did a host of other government authorities. Locals made a number of demands, and the Government agreed that an integral audit of the pipeline was needed, given that the March 4 rupture was the fifth serious incident in fifteen months. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which loaned \$130 million to the Camisea consortium for the pipeline, released a communique stating that it "is deeply concerned about the five spills that have occurred on the Camisea natural gas liquids pipeline since 2004." The Bank stated that its engineers would perform an expanded review and analysis of the project design.

Source - ConsultAndes

126. Argentina: Hydrogen Pilot Reactor

MAR. 03, 2006 - A group of investigators in Argentina are studying how to utilize hydrogen obtained through renewable and non-contaminated bio-energy resources such as sugar cane, corn, sorghum and beet plantations. The project consists of a pilot reactor producing synthesized gas and hydrogen, through a renewable resource, as a product of bio-ethanol. This technological advance will help reduce the current climatic effects contributing to global warming. The final objective of the plan is to utilize the pure hydrogen as a combustible for electric vehicles. It is important to be able to use hydrogen in the same place it is produced. Currently, vehicles that directly utilize hydrogen have problems with the storage of hydrogen because it requires very low temperatures and high pressures resulting in high costs and safety risks.

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Source - Pagina 12 (no link). Kindly shared by US Embassy Buenos Aires

127. Venezuela's Pipeline Strikes Out

MAR. 02, 2006 - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's proposal to build a natural gas pipeline is probably not possible. Ninety percent of Venezuelan natural gas reserves are associated with oil and cannot be produced at will without ruining the oil reservoirs; 40 percent of the gas currently produced has to be put back into the reservoirs to preserve them. The official projections of Venezuelan gas production for the next decade indicate that the country will have barely enough natural gas to satisfy its domestic needs. The pipeline probably would not be economic, either. Building costs would be \$25 billion to \$30 billion, which would require the gas to be sold in Argentina at the equivalent of \$110 for a barrel of oil. Finally, the pipeline would be undesirable for the environment. The Amazon already is in a grave stage of degradation, and a pipeline would constitute a further threat.

Source - Washington Post

General

128. Cartagena Protocol Meeting Decides To Label GMO Exports

MAR. 18, 2006 - The Meeting of Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (MOP 3) decided to implement the labeling of food product exports

containing genetically modified organisms, but only in six years, with interim rules for gradual implementation that benefit non-signatory countries. Brazilian business daily Valor Economico reports that the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) begins to discuss in Curitiba the issue of "bio-prospecting," or the capture of genetic materials for use in the development of new products. According to the daily, Brazil, India and African countries defend the creation of specific international legislation regulating this process to prevent biopiracy, something that countries such as Australia and some European and Asian countries oppose because of the costs it could create for research.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

129. Chile: Caving Expedition Makes Historic Discovery in Patagonia

MAR. 8, 2006 - A team of French and Chilean cave explorers discovered cave paintings and indigenous tombs on a remote Patagonian island that had been considered uninhabitable. The surprised investigators were the members of "Ultimate Patagonia 2006," a two-month long caving expedition organized by the French Speleology Federation in collaboration with the University of Chile and Catholic University in Santiago. The destination of the thirty speleologists, biologists and geologists was Madre de Dios Island, a rocky outpost of porous lime toward the tip of Patagonia, where

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Chile crumbles into the South Pacific. Twenty-four hours by boat from Puerto Natales, the island is hardly an alluring homeland. Until now there has been no evidence of a human presence there. Nelson Aguilera, of the National Corporation of Indigenous Development, called the discoveries "historic:" "One thing that is certain is that the Caneros of the region at some point reached the Pacific coast, an archeological certainty that didn't exist before this expedition." A complete report on the expedition's findings will be published in six months.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

130. Venezuela: Mining Activities Halted in River Basin

FEB. 22, 2006 - In order to protect the Caroni River Basin, in the state of Bolivar (border with Brazil), the GOV has imposed a halt on all mining activities in Icabaru, Cuyuni, and La Paragua. According to the press report, the permit for mining in the region expired December 31, 2005. Mining activities performed in the water have been forbidden as of March 10; and those mining activities on land have a period of six months as of February 18 to terminate. Although the military has been called upon to ensure the mining is ended in the region, Lieutenant Colonel Jesus Vitelmo Willhem Becerra points out that this is part of a program developed together with all [Venezuelan] Ministries and entities concerned about the environment and protecting the Caroni River basin.

Source - Diario El Progreso

131. Chevening Scholarships in Biodiversity

Chevening Scholarships bring students from all regions of the world, including South America, to work for one year at the Center in Cambridge, UK. Scholars are expected to work with the Center's staff on programs ranging from managing data about ecosystems and biodiversity, to interpreting and analyzing that data to provide assessment and policy analysis. The work will contribute to and help to shape national and international decision-making processes and help to place authoritative biodiversity knowledge at the center of decision-making. Candidates must be between 25 and 35 years of age and be fluent in English. They must hold an undergraduate degree, and preferably also a postgraduate degree, in a biological or environmental science or one related to economics, GIS and the environment. Candidates should apply on the Chevening Scholarships form attaching a resume, publications list and cover letter explaining why they wish to spend a year at the Center. Application forms are available from, and should be submitted through any UK Embassy, High Commission or British Council office, or to:

Chevening Administrator
UNEP-WCMC
219 Huntingdon Road
Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK.

Source - UNEP

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Update on Avian Influenza

[132. Renowned Bird Flu Expert Warns: Be Prepared](#)

MAR. 14, 2006 - Robert G. Webster is one of the few bird flu experts confident enough to answer the key question: Will the avian flu switch from posing a terrible hazard to birds to becoming a real threat to humans? There are "about even odds at this time for the virus to learn how to transmit human to human," he told ABC's "World News Tonight." Webster, the Rosemary Thomas Chair at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, is credited as the first scientist to find the link between human flu and bird flu.

Webster and his team of scientists are working to find a way to beat the virus if it morphs. He has even been dubbed the Flu Hunter.

Right now, H5N1, a type of avian influenza virus, has confined itself to birds. It can be transmitted from bird to human but only by direct contact with the droppings and excretions of infected birds.

Source - ABC News

[133. Flamingo Deaths Spark Bird Flu Probe in Bahamas](#)

FEB. 28, 2006 - Health experts were dispatched on February 28 to the southern Bahamas island of Inagua to find out if an unexplained spate of bird deaths was linked to a deadly bird flu virus that is spreading around the globe. Over the past two days, 15 of the island's famed flamingos, five roseate spoonbills and one cormorant have been found dead with no external injuries on the island just north of Haiti, officials said. Scientists from the Bahamas Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Environmental Health will gather samples from the birds and then submit them for laboratory analysis.

NOTE: A few weeks later, the possibility of Avian Influenza in the region was discarded

Source - Alertnet
LINEHAN